

BALAAM THE MAD PROPHET

March 12, 2014 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article)

“Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam *the son of Bosor*, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet” (2 Peter 2:15-16).

The long narrative about Balaam in Numbers 22-24 is given to show Jehovah God's preeminence over the heathen gods. He alone is God. He is the holy, Almighty Creator. He cannot be defeated with arms and he cannot be defeated with magic. His plans cannot be thwarted.

The account of Balaam is a dramatic illustration of the truth of Isaiah 44:6-11 --

“Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it*? ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*. They that make a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image *that* is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they *are* of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, *and* they shall be ashamed together.”

As the event unfolds, Israel was camped on the east side of the Jordan River across from Jericho (Nu. 22:1).

After Israel defeated Sihon and Og farther north (Numbers 21), Balak king of Moab saw that he could not defeat Israel militarily, so he called a famous diviner named Balaam to curse Israel.

1. Who was Balaam?

Balaam was from Pethor in Mesopotamia (Nu. 22:5; De. 23:4). It was on the Euphrates River possibly near Mari. To reach Mari from Moab, one had only to proceed north up the well-traveled King's Highway to Damascus and then continue northeast to the Euphrates.

From the time of Nimrod and Asshur, Mesopotamia had been a hotbed of Babylonian idolatry and occultism. “The discovery of a vast number of cuneiform tablets at Mari, beginning in 1933, revealed among other things the existence of a complex cult of prophets and seers whose activities precisely resemble those of Balaam” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Balaam was a pagan diviner; he is called a soothsayer in Joshua 13:22. Balaam did not know Jehovah God; He knew *about* Him. Knowledge of Jehovah had spread all over that part of the world by then because of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Balaam used the name Jehovah (Nu. 22:19), not because he knew God personally, but because he tried to make himself a servant of Jehovah in order to manipulate Him. Like all good witchdoctors, Balaam was a master schemer. Balaam practiced divination by using such methods as looking into the liver. We perhaps see this in Numbers 22:40, as the sheep's liver was preferred. (See the PowerPoint presentation #5 "Ancient Babylon" in *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms*.) Balaam thought God could be controlled by enchantments (Nu. 24:2). He thought God is changeable like pagan gods (Nu. 23:13-14, 27-29). Balaam went along with Balak's divination efforts because he believed in such things. This is the first mention of Baal in the Bible (Num. 22:41). Balaam was perfectly at home in this idolatrous context.

Balaam spoke prophecies but he was not a true prophet of God. God can use anything He pleases. He even spoke by Balaam's ass (Nu. 22:28). God gave prophecies to the heathen kings Pharaoh (Gen. 41:25), and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel).

Balaam was an enemy of God and he perished with the enemies of God (Nu. 31:7-8). Balaam was doubtless with the Midianites to instruct them and to get rewards from them.

2. Balaam's journey to Moab

Question: Why did God first tell Balaam not to go and then tell him not to go? Compare Num. 22:12, 20.

God first let Balaam show his true character. Balaam did this in his first reply to the elders of Moab (Nu. 22:7-13). Balaam made it sound like God had only forbidden him to go at that time (verse 13). He also did not tell them that God had specifically said he could not curse Israel for Israel is blessed. Balaam left this out because secretly he wanted to leave the door open for them to return. It was a negotiating process! Balaam proved from the beginning that he was a deceiver and not a true servant of Jehovah. After Balaam showed his true character, God used him for His purposes to show His power over the gods of the nations. This is like the situation with Pharaoh. Pharaoh rejected God the very first time Moses stood before him, and God hardened his heart and made him stubborn to the very end to make an example of him.

Question: Why did God get angry at Balaam and try to kill him on the way to Moab after He had told him to go? See Num. 22:20, 22-35.

God did not get angry because Balaam obeyed Him in going, but because of Balaam's motive for going. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we see in the New Testament that Balaam was plotting how he could manipulate Jehovah and get the rewards that were offered. Peter tells us that Balaam was rebuked for his covetousness (2 Pet. 2:15-16). Peter speaks of "the madness of the prophet." This refers to his madness in thinking he could manipulate Jehovah God and find a way to curse Israel and get the reward of divination. The angel of the Lord said told Balaam that his way was "perverse" (Nu. 22:32).

3. Balak's attempt to curse Israel (Nu. 22-24)

Israel was protected by God's covenant through Abraham (Nu. 24:9; Gen. 12:3). Any curse of Israel will come back upon the head of the one who curses. Likewise the believer is blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). It is impossible to curse that which God has blessed (Nu. 23:8, 23; Rom. 8:31). Proverbs 26:2 says "the curse causeless cannot come," which means that a curse that is undeserved will not land and remain on a person, just as the sparrow and swallow flit around here and there and do not stay in one place. Hindu priests and occultists have tried to curse me, but to no avail, because I am safe in Christ. One man prophesied that I would be dead within the year, but that was a dozen years ago! The Bible says, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4).

God sees no sin in Israel (Nu. 23:21). This describes believing Israel's eternal position in the Messiah. It does describe every Jew (Rom. 2:28-29). It also describes the New Testament believer's position as clothed in Christ's righteousness. Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Balaam gives a prophecy of the Messiah (Nu. 24:17). He is described as a star and a scepter, denoting His glory and power (a scepter is a king's rod of authority, Esther 5:2). The star might refer to the star that the wise men saw at Christ's birth (Mat. 2:1-2). Jesus is the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16). The morning star appears in the darkest part of the night, just before the dawn. Likewise, Jesus will come for His saints in the end time. The Messiah will establish His kingdom and rule with His scepter over all the world (Psa. 45:6).

4. Miscellaneous lessons about Balaam

Balaam is a warning against covetousness (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). Peter and Jude prophesied that false teachers in the end time will be like Balaam. The true preacher of God must not be covetous (1 Tim. 3:3).

Balaam is a warning against having a knowledge of God apart from salvation. He is a warning against "nominal Christianity" which means to profess Christ without saving faith. Since the first church in Jerusalem, multitudes of professing Christians have been nominal Christians. Balaam knew many things about God but he did not know God personally in repentance and faith. Compare Matthew 7:21-23, which teaches that there will be many who profess Christ but are not known by Him. They trust in their works rather than in the blood of Christ alone. 2 Timothy 3:5 describes those who have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." The power of true godliness is the new birth (2 Cor. 5:17). They deny the saving power of God by their unregenerate lives. See 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Those who have a form of godliness are those who turn aside to fables and live according to their own lusts. The nominal Christian is described in Revelation 3:15-16 as the lukewarm Christian. If he were a true Christian, Christ would not "spew" him out. The book of Hebrews is a warning about nominal Christianity. See Hebrews 4:1, 2, 11. Just as in Israel not all had saving faith, so in the churches not all have saving faith. Preachers must do what Paul did in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and exhort professing Christians to examine themselves "whether ye be in the faith."

Balaam is a warning against hypocrisy (Nu. 22:18). His bold profession about loving God was a lie! Beware of big talkers who don't live what they profess. Compare Luke 12:1; 1 Timothy 4:1-2.

Balaam is a warning against worldliness in the churches. When Balaam saw that he could not curse Israel, he taught Balak to entice Israel with sin so that God would judge them (Rev. 2:14; Nu. 25:1-18; 31:14-16). This is a warning of the danger of breaking down the walls of separation between the church and the world. Compare James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16. An example today is how the Contemporary Christian Music philosophy which destroys the church's holy, separated character. (For documentation of this, see the video series *Music for Good or Evil*, available from Way of Life Literature.)

Distributed by Way of Life Literature Inc.'s Fundamental Baptist Information Service, an e-mail listing for Fundamental Baptists and other fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians. Established in 1974, Way of Life Literature is a fundamental Baptist preaching and publishing ministry based in Bethel Baptist Church, London, Ontario, of which Wilbert Unger is the founding Pastor. Brother Cloud lives in South Asia where he has been a church planting missionary since 1979. OUR GOAL IN THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF OUR MINISTRY IS NOT DEVOTIONAL BUT IS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ASSIST PREACHERS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS APOSTATE HOUR. This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the list. If somehow you have subscribed unintentionally, following are the instructions for removal. The Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list is automated. To SUBSCRIBE, go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/subscribe.html>. TO UNSUBSCRIBE OR CHANGE ADDRESSES, go to the very bottom of any email received from us and click "Manage My Subscription." If you have any trouble with this, please let us know. We take up a quarterly offering to fund this ministry, and those who use the materials are expected to participate (Galatians 6:6) if they can. Some of the articles are from O Timothy magazine, which is in its 31st year of publication. Way of Life publishes many helpful books. The catalog is located at the web site: <http://www.wayoflife.org/publications/index.html>. Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061. 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org. We do not solicit funds from those who do not agree with our preaching and who are not helped by these publications, but only from those who are. OFFERINGS can be made at <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/makeanoffering.html>. PAYPAL offerings can be made to <https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=dcloud%40wayoflife.org>

WAY OF LIFE LITERATURE SHARING POLICY: Much of our material is available for free, such as the hundreds of articles at the Way of Life web site. Other items we sell to help fund our expensive literature, video, and foreign church planting ministry. Way of Life's content falls into two categories: sharable and non-sharable. Things that we encourage you to share include the audio sermons, O Timothy magazine, FBIS articles, and the free eVideos and free eBooks. You are welcome to make copies of these at your own expense and share them with friends and family, but they cannot be posted to web sites. You are also welcome to use excerpts from the articles in your own writings, in sermons, in church bulletins, etc. All we ask is that you give proper credit. Things we do not want copied and distributed freely are items like the Fundamental Baptist Digital Library, print edition of our books, PDFs and other electronic editions of the books that we sell, the eVideos that we sell, etc. The items have taken years to produce at enormous expense in time and money, and we need the income from sales to help fund the ministry. We trust that your Christian honesty will preserve the integrity of this policy. "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Timothy 5:18).